

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



PA 11-54—sSB 927

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Education Committee

Appropriations Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING REQUIREMENTS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

SUMMARY: This act makes several changes to the required qualifications for early childhood educators. It modifies the (1) staff qualification requirements that are in effect until July 1, 2015 and (2) criteria for eligible degree programs and certifications. It specifies that, on and after July 1, 2015, the staff qualification requirements apply to all preschool programs accepting state funds, including school readiness or childcare services funds and funds from the Department of Social Services (DSS).

The act also, with certain exceptions, delays, from July 1, 2015 until July 1, 2020, the requirement that programs have a person in each classroom with a teaching certificate or bachelor's degree in certain fields. It instead requires (1) at least 50% of early childhood educators with primary responsibility for a classroom to meet this requirement by July 1, 2015 and (2) the remaining individuals to have an associate's degree. It requires the Department of Higher Education (DHE) to develop a plan to meet these requirements.

The act specifically allows up to \$500,000 in unexpended school readiness funds each fiscal year to be used in the subsequent fiscal year to help early childhood education programs' staff members meet the degree requirements. It allows staff members to receive up to \$5,000 per year for this purpose.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2011

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

Requirements until July 1, 2015

Until July 1, 2015, prior law required each school readiness classroom to have an individual with a (1) credential, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree that included 12 credits or more in early childhood education or child development or (2) a teaching certificate with an endorsement in early childhood education or special education. The credentialing organization had to be approved by the education commissioner, and the early childhood education or childhood development credits had to be from an institution accredited by the Board of Governors of Higher Education (BGHE) or regionally accredited.

The act specifies that the (1) credential must be a childhood development associate credential or equivalent and (2) early childhood education or child development credits must be determined by the DHE commissioner, in consultation with the education and social services commissioners.

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Requirements from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2020

Under prior law, after July 1, 2015, each school readiness classroom had to have an individual who has (1) a bachelor's degree from an institution accredited by BGHE or regionally accredited in early childhood education, childhood development, or a related field approved by the education commissioner or (2) a teaching certificate with an endorsement in early childhood or special education.

The act instead requires, from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2020, that 50% of individuals with primary responsibility for a classroom of children meet the above requirement. Early childhood educators who do not meet this requirement must hold an associate's degree in an eligible field.

The act also (1) extends this requirement to cover all early childhood education programs accepting state funds, including school readiness or childcare services funds and DSS funds, and (2) specifies that everyone with primary responsibility for a classroom with children must meet the requirement. Prior law required only one such individual to be in the classroom.

In addition, the act:

1. eliminates the ability to meet the degree requirement by attending a regionally accredited institution (i.e., one that is out-of-state);
2. specifies that early childhood special education (rather than special education) is a qualifying endorsement for a teaching certificate;
3. specifies that eligible degree programs and concentrations are early childhood education, child study, child development, or human growth and development; and
4. requires the programs to be approved by the Department of Education (SDE) and DHE.

Requirements Beginning July 1, 2020

Effective July 1, 2020, the act requires that all, rather than only 50%, of the individuals with primary responsibility for a classroom of children meet the requirement to have a bachelor's degree or teaching certificate.

Exceptions

The act exempts from the requirements taking effect on July 1, 2015 and July 1, 2020 individuals who (1) hold a bachelor's degree and are employed as teachers on or before June 30, 2015 by an early childhood education program accepting state funds and (2) meet the qualification requirements that are in effect until June 30, 2015. It prohibits early childhood education programs from terminating such individuals from employment to meet the staff qualification requirements that take effect on July 1, 2015 and July 1, 2020.

Additionally, if an individual has a bachelor's degree in a field other than early childhood education, child study, child development, or human growth and development, the act allows him or her to apply to SDE to determine whether the degree has a sufficient concentration in early childhood education to meet the requirements for early childhood educators.

Plan Required

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The act requires DHE to develop a plan to meet the bachelor's degree and teaching certificate requirements, including strategies for retaining individuals who do not meet them. It must consult with SDE; DSS; the Office of Workforce Competitiveness; and representatives from (1) public and independent institutions of higher education in Connecticut, (2) early childhood education programs accepting school readiness funds, and (3) any other group or organization DHE deems appropriate.

DHE must submit the plan by February 1, 2012 to the Education and Higher Education committees. From 2013 to 2015, it must submit annual reports on the plan's implementation (by February 1 each year) to the committees.

SCHOOL READINESS FUNDS

By law, the education commissioner may use unexpended school readiness funds for several purposes, including professional development for school readiness staff. The act specifically allows up to \$500,000 in unexpended school readiness funds each fiscal year to be used in the subsequent fiscal year to help early childhood education programs' staff members meet the act's qualification requirements. It allows staff members to receive up to \$5,000 in assistance per year for courses leading to a bachelor's degree or, before December 31, 2013, an associate's degree in the fields listed above up to the extent of their financial need. Staff members must (1) have first applied for all available federal and state scholarships and grants and (2) attend an in-state public or a Connecticut-based for-profit or nonprofit institution of higher education.

Under the act, FY 13 is the first year that unexpended funds may be used for this purpose. The SDE commissioner, in consultation with the DHE commissioner, must determine how the unexpended funds are distributed, and local school readiness programs must apply for unexpended funds in their school readiness grant application.

OLR Tracking: TA:JM:JL:ro